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China's New Group Armies: Adopting a Concept of Modern Warfare

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An Intelligence Assessment

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EA 87-10016C

June 1987

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China's New Group Armies: Adopting a Concept of Modern Warfare

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by [redacted] Office
of East Asian Analysis, [redacted]

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Comments and queries are welcome and may be
directed to the Chief, China Division, OEA [redacted]

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Issued 1087

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**China's New Group Armies:
Adopting a Concept of
Modern Warfare**



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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 1 June 1987
was used in this report.*

Over the past decade, Beijing has moved decisively to prepare the People's Liberation Army (PLA) for modern combat, acquiring selected advanced weapons technology, trimming the armed forces by at least 2 million, and promoting younger, combat-experienced officers to prominent positions in regional and national commands. Although modernization has touched all arms of the military, China's ground forces are undergoing the most sweeping reforms. China's 35 field armies have been consolidated into 24 more powerful "group armies," creating the framework for a modern Army with greater mobility, firepower, and combined-arms integration.



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The amalgamation of firstline ground forces into group armies has not fundamentally altered the distribution of military strength along sensitive borders:

- Along the Sino-Soviet border, most combat troops from the four disbanded field armies were absorbed into 13 new, larger group armies. The group armies are still far from equal in fighting power to their Soviet counterparts, and we expect that group armies opposite the USSR will continue to have priority in receiving China's limited supply of modern weapons.
- Opposite Vietnam, seven field armies were reduced to four larger group armies.
- Despite the elimination of one field army opposite Taiwan, China's combat capability has probably been only slightly reduced.



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As a result of resource constraints and long-term defense priorities, we believe that China's military modernization program may result in the emergence of two distinct types of group armies in the next decade. Group armies deployed against Vietnam and Taiwan will probably remain infantry-heavy forces, and primary equipment improvements will probably



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consist of weapons best suited to supporting infantry operations. In contrast, group armies arrayed against the Soviet Union will become mechanized formations, and potentially offer a capability to project military power. []

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The amount of combat equipment and combined-arms integration of Chinese frontline units has improved, but even the most advanced group armies remain markedly inferior to their Soviet adversaries:

- For example, the Soviet 35th Army—deployed against China’s Shenyang Military Region—has almost three times as many tanks, four times as many armored fighting vehicles, and almost twice as many artillery pieces as one of China’s best equipped group armies.
- Soviet group armies in the Far East have an entire range of weapons unavailable to Chinese units, including short-range FROG and medium-range Scud-B tactical missiles, mobile surface-to-air-missile batteries, and combat helicopters.

Indeed, as its military strength grows, Beijing will need to avoid unduly increasing friction with Moscow that could lead to an arms race that China cannot win. []

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Beijing’s recognition of these equipment deficiencies, however, does not mean that China is ready to buy large quantities of military hardware from the West. Rather, Beijing is more likely for the next few years to seek critical technologies from the West to “leapfrog” the weapons of the 1970s and 1980s and to revamp its defense industries to build the “smart” weapons capable of meeting the anticipated Soviet threat of the 21st century. The Chinese have already proposed joint US-China development of a sophisticated antitank missile, and they have investigated coproducing the US Patriot advanced air defense system and relatively low-cost means of countering Soviet armor, such as the US Copperhead laser-guided artillery projectile. []

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Beijing is looking for assistance in developing its operations research capabilities, and it is currently as interested in the US management approach to military research and development as in hardware. Beijing’s

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record on producing the appropriate weapon, in the right decade to meet the threat, is abysmal, and China's defense industry leaders are intent on correcting this shortcoming [redacted]

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To overcome the shortage of funds for weapons research and development, Beijing has increasingly sought "creative financing" arrangements in the West. [redacted]

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[redacted] the Chinese will increasingly seek Western assistance in areas that can make significant improvements to their group armies without substantial expenditures:

- *Combat Doctrine and Operational Concepts.* We believe Beijing intends to take full advantage of US and NATO experience in combined-arms operations and knowledge of Soviet doctrine and tactics. Chinese military leaders have asked [redacted] to lecture at the newly formed National Defense University, and Chinese strategic and doctrinal planners hosted a conference in Beijing with US Army combat operations experts in February.
- *Combined-Armed Tactics.* Beijing clearly recognizes the value of Western combined-arms experience, and greater exposure to Western war-fighting doctrine would probably improve Chinese combined-arms operations.
- *Force Management.* As its appreciation for the cost and complexity of ground force equipment grows, China will probably focus on Western logistics management techniques. Although Beijing probably does not perceive a need to copy Western force-sustainment methods, the PLA may adopt a more centralized, demand-driven logistics system to manage its most expensive weapon components.

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In some cases—to explore concepts requiring modern equipment—the Chinese General Staff will buy a few items of military hardware from the West. For example, in late March Beijing purchased eight French light attack helicopters to form an experimental Army aviation corps subordinate to a group army. This small purchase, however, will probably be the extent of light attack helicopter acquisitions from the West at least through the end of 1990. [redacted]

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As expected in such a fundamental reorganization of military forces, Beijing's short-term problems are substantial. 
 although difficulties are recognized, few PLA officers are questioning the efficacy of the reorganization. Emphasis in the near term will be on low-cost areas of force restructuring, training, development of operational art, and experimentation. Beijing's formation of the group armies is only the first step in a long process to produce a truly modern force capable of meeting any adversary, even the Soviet Union, in the 21st century. 

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Figure 1. Combined-arms training is a top priority for the new group armies.

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China's New Group Armies: Adopting a Concept of Modern Warfare

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Group Armies Take Shape on the Soviet Border

Stimulated by the markedly improved Soviet military threat opposite its northern border and by the problems in coordination and communication that occurred during its 1979 war with Vietnam, Beijing during this past decade has moved decisively to prepare the People's Liberation Army (PLA) for modern combat. Military leaders have acquired selected advanced weapons and foreign weapons technology, trimmed the armed forces by at least 2 million to the current level of 4-5 million, and promoted younger officers with combat experience to prominent positions in regional and national commands.

Although modernization has touched all arms of the military, China's ground forces are undergoing the most sweeping reforms—structural changes that have eliminated field armies in favor of more powerful combined-arms armies. The transition to these group armies culminates a decadelong drive to break with the central tenet of the Maoist People's War strategy—trading land for time to mobilize China's huge population for guerrilla assaults on overextended enemy forces.

An early indication of the transformation in China's defense doctrine came in the summer of 1981 with a series of military maneuvers near Zhangjiakou some 150 kilometers north of Beijing.

Applying the Lessons of Korea and Vietnam

Origins of the current reforms date from the Korean war, where massed Chinese infantry formations were often decimated by the overwhelming firepower of UN forces, and US air superiority wreaked havoc with tenuous Chinese supply lines. The organizational structure that had served the PLA well during its guerrilla and civil wars was not readily adaptable to the modern battlefield and conditions outside the Chinese mainland: foreign "masses" could not be mobilized to provide supplies or intelligence to Chinese combatants, and lightly armed infantry units ultimately could not beat artillery- and armor-heavy opponents.

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Realization of Beijing's inability to protect regional interests crystallized following the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia in 1978, when the threat of China's military power was not sufficient to deter Hanoi from attacking a Chinese ally. China's invasion of northern Vietnam in 1979 failed to force Hanoi to withdraw from Cambodia and accomplished only limited military objectives at considerable economic and human cost. The invasion illustrated the inadequacies of PLA doctrine—Chinese field commanders failed to adequately synchronize the actions of combat elements, and tactical flexibility was further constrained by a cumbersome command and control system. Combined-arms integration has become a central goal of the current reform movement.

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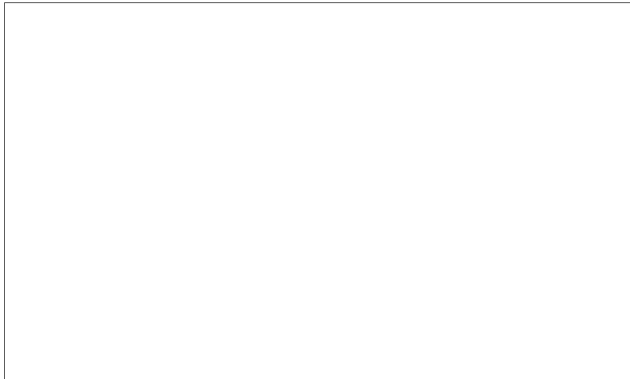
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The most serious problem facing the group armies is that they lack sufficient quantities of modern military hardware:

- Only a few group armies have mechanized infantry formations, and many still lack sufficient trucks to move and support their soldiers on the battlefield.
- Group armies have only limited quantities of the shoulder-fired HN-5 (SA-7) air defense missile. The HN-5 provides only a close-in defense of four kilometers or less, and the organic air defense needs are still largely provided by visually aimed, towed anti-aircraft pieces of World War II vintage.

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The Group Army Goes Nationwide

In May 1985, Central Military Commission Chairman Deng Xiaoping announced the consolidation of all remaining field armies to combined-arms group armies.



- Beijing's only antitank missile deployed in any numbers is the HJ-73 (a copy of the Soviet wire-guided Sagger system), which is easily susceptible to countermeasures and has an obsolete warhead unable to penetrate the armor of any tank more modern than the Soviet T-62.

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These and other equipment shortfalls, particularly in the combat support area, are unlikely to be remedied soon, for China's military budget is severely restricted by more pressing economic needs.

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Present group armies are relatively unwieldy structures. We believe the sheer size of the new formations and geographical separation of subordinate units are severely testing existing command, control, and logistics systems, impeding China's drive to weld group armies into cohesive combined-arms organizations.²



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² US Army observers at recent PLA combined-arms exercises have noted the lack of integration between Chinese combat teams—foot soldiers and tanks operate separately on the battlefield, leaving infantry exposed to unsuppressed enemy small-arms fire, and tanks vulnerable to antitank missiles.

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Transitional Problems

As expected in such a fundamental reorganization of military forces, Beijing's short-term problems are substantial. The simple act of streamlining the force, for example, has led to severe problems in placing the several hundred thousand demobilized PLA officers in equivalent civilian posts and disgruntlement among many who believed that they were guaranteed lifelong careers in the armed forces.



Public speeches by China's highest military officials underscore that they believe the problems are solvable and that, in the long run, China's defense interests will be far better served by the new military organization.

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Moreover, the restructuring has been tremendously disruptive—Chinese military publications indicate that some infantry divisions were converted en masse to artillery and antiaircraft brigades—forcing the retraining of large numbers of officers and senior enlisted personnel. The massive reorganization has also disrupted traditional command relationships—and crucial career ties—between officers.

The impact of these disruptions has probably been magnified by outdated command and control procedures.

Two other notable problems are the result of a tradition of regional orientation. Although nominally national forces, China's group armies remain closely associated with individual military regions.

Officers, for example, are trained at military region academies and usually spend entire careers serving in a single group army or military region.

China's traditional emphasis on regional defenses and self-reliant combat troops has produced a logistic system poorly suited for movement of forces nationally. The PLA logistic system is designed to ensure that ground forces can operate independently even if cut off from Beijing, and to minimize the burden on the civilian economy by making the PLA as self-sufficient as possible. The result is a highly decentralized supply system, best suited to supporting defensive infantry

“push-driven”³ system is adequate for unmechanized peacetime forces with low ammunition consumption rates—most PLA artillery batteries, for example, fire only a handful of shells a year—but would probably be overwhelmed by the wartime requirements of a more modern ground force. Much of China's basic military equipment—spare parts, calibration, and diagnostic equipment—is produced and managed by military regions, using different administrative procedures. Moreover, among China's weapons and ammunition factories—many of which produce identical items—there is little standardization in such basic areas as spare parts numbering systems or shipping container designs. These characteristics severely constrain Beijing's ability to move group armies away from the military region support network.

But Long-Term Gains

Despite the problems, the combined-arms army is the foundation upon which Beijing can build a modern ground army. Already, the changing structure has revitalized the discussion of strategy and tactics and forced officers in the various service arms of the PLA to think far more realistically about war on the modern battlefield. Numerous articles in China's premier military newspaper, the *Liberation Army Daily*, indicate that a lively discussion of combined-arms operations is under way.

Compared with field armies and the 1982 version of the combined-arms armies, the new table of organization offers greater mobility, firepower, and combined-arms integration (see table 1). In the past year, entirely new combat organizations have appeared throughout the PLA, and previously independent tank, artillery, engineer, air defense, and chemical defense units have been subordinated to group armies. Although equipment levels and readiness postures continue to depend on mission and location, Chinese main force units are probably more standardized under the group army structure than at any previous

³ Unlike Western and Soviet armies, PLA units do not customarily requisition supplies from logistics centers, but instead receive regular, predetermined shipments of spare parts and ammunition.

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Table 1
The Evolution of China's Group Army:
Increased Firepower and
Combined-Arms Integration

	Tanks	SP Artillery	Field Artillery	AAA	ATGM Launchers	AFVs/ APCs
Chinese field army total (pre-1981)	80		294	96	0	14
Tank regiment	80					14
Artillery regiment			60			
AAA regiment				42		
Three infantry divisions						
Nine infantry regiments			54	54		
Three artillery regiments			180			
Early Chinese combined-arms army total (1981-85)	240		414	264	0	120
Tank division	240					120
Artillery division			180			
AAA division				210		
Three infantry divisions						
Nine infantry regiments			54	54		
Three artillery regiments			180			
New Chinese group army total (post-1985)	480	18	498	462	108	366
Tank division	240	18	66	66	36	240
Artillery brigade			90		18	
AAA brigade				90		
Three infantry divisions						
Nine infantry regiments			162	162	18	
Three tank regiments	240			18	18	126
Three artillery regiments			180		18	
Three AAA regiments				126		

Note: These figures represent estimated orders of battle for ideal ground formations Chinese combat doctrine, weapons production capabilities, and regional deployment patterns. Many past and present Chinese ground force formations lack uniformity, and most of China's other group armies lack at least some of these elements.

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time. Moreover, heavy equipment has been distributed to lower command levels—increasing regimental combat capabilities and, at a minimum, forcing increased familiarity with mechanized and combined-arms operations at the lower echelons. Finally, Chinese tactical mobility has also progressed;

Correcting the Flaws

Beijing's military leadership clearly understands it thus far has created only a basic framework and appears to be moving aggressively to fill in some of the gaps.

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[Redacted]

[Redacted] last year, major combined-arms training exercises were conducted near China's most sensitive borders.

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The exercises may have been, in part, designed to demonstrate to Moscow and Hanoi that China's military preparedness has not been weakened by

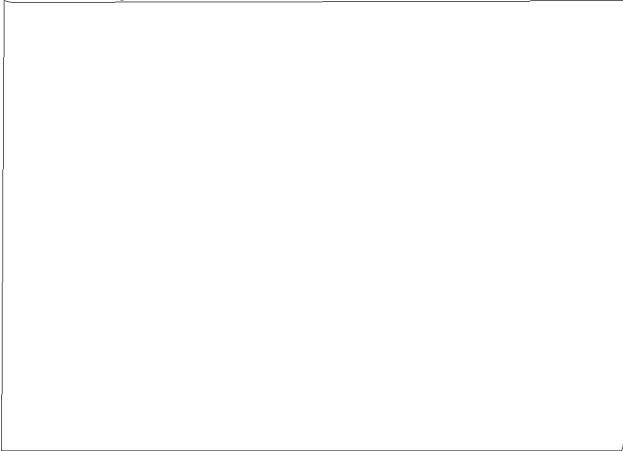
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military reorganization. The maneuvers also underscored Beijing's resolve to correct one of China's most fundamental combat weaknesses: poor coordination between ground forces and close air support aircraft.



Acquiring New Weapons

China has made considerable progress toward developing some of the new weapons and equipment needed to give offensive punch to group armies. In the past three years, Beijing has unveiled an impressive variety of weapons, including an improved main battle tank, new armored personnel carriers, self-propelled and towed artillery, and lightweight surface-to-air missiles. [redacted] China's most elite group armies in the northeast are receiving China's newest ground weapons: in the 39th Group Army, for example, the 116th Division—with more than 400 armored vehicles—became China's second fully mechanized infantry division last year, and the 117th Division has received new tanks with Western-designed 105-mm main guns and armored personnel carriers with West German engines. [redacted]

The new systems are being provided in small quantities, however, and China would be unlikely to fully equip its forces opposite the USSR for at least 10 years. Moreover, the Soviets almost certainly would continue upgrading their forces during this period. As these new weapons are deployed, however, and until

the Soviets add new weapon systems to their forces along the border, the Chinese systems will begin to fill some glaring gaps in Beijing's defenses:

- New, extended-range artillery systems provide impressive fire support, equaling or exceeding the range of the Soviet guns facing them.
- The new Chinese tank is superior in range, accuracy, and mobility to standard T-54/55 and T-62 tanks, which make up 90 percent of Soviet tanks currently facing China.
- The new infantry fighting vehicles offer a challenge to the BMP-1, the backbone of Soviet mechanized infantry forces in Asia; the automatic cannon of Chinese infantry fighting vehicles demonstrated at an arms show in Beijing late last year could destroy BMPs at ranges up to 3,000 meters. However, if the Soviets fit BMPs in the Far East with additional armor—as they have in Eastern Europe and Afghanistan—this range would be considerably reduced.
- Deployment of self-propelled antiaircraft artillery (AAA) and infantry fighting vehicles with automatic cannons would provide Chinese mechanized forces with improved defense against Soviet attack helicopters [redacted]

Training the Modern Soldier

The composition of the Chinese officer corps is also undergoing a transformation. [redacted] Chinese officers are no longer promoted directly from the enlisted ranks; all new officers must at least be senior middle school (high school) graduates and complete a two-year officer training course at a military academy. Furthermore, to attract China's most educated youth to the military, college graduates can receive commissions after completing a one-year officer training course, or completing military training courses now mandatory at some civilian universities. [redacted]

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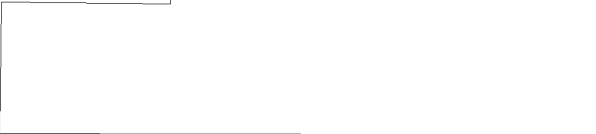
Equally profound changes are under way in China's enlisted ranks, aimed at increasing the number of technically trained soldiers by creating a career non-commissioned officer (NCO) corps. The first NCO training academy was opened last year to retain technically skilled enlisted men who can no longer expect to advance to officer ranks. An NCO career system also provides a base for training conscripts and wartime mobilization of a ready reserve. Within group armies, a skilled NCO corps will free junior officers from technical and administrative tasks and—like most Western armies—will allow officers to focus on improving leadership and command.

throughout China have participated in Beijing's campaign of military pressure against Vietnam.⁴ During a recent visit to the Shijiazhuang officer academy south of Beijing, Chinese officers told a US training delegation that duty at Malipo was considered an elite assignment for new officers, who can test their command abilities in combat against battle-hardened Vietnamese troops. Beijing is more fully exploiting the training opportunity provided by the Malipo campaign this year.

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Over the past three years, two highly specialized means have been used to provide very different types of training experiences for China's ground forces. The most dramatic of these is the battlefield south of the town of Malipo on the Vietnamese border where, since April 1984, troops from



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Implications for the Regional Balance

Although combat at Malipo provides battle-hardening for China's rejuvenated officer corps, it offers little in terms of combined-arms experience.

Moreover, the fighting at Malipo has provided no opportunities to improve the PLA's most pressing deficiencies: close air support and integrated armor and infantry operations. Neither side has used aircraft to support infantry operations on the battlefield, and armored vehicles are unsuited to the mountainous terrain of Malipo.

China has turned to the West for advanced training techniques. Chinese military visitors to the National Training Center at Fort Irwin, California, indicated that China was preparing its first national combined-arms training center near Nanjing.

reports in the Chinese press indicate that the center is using selected state-of-the-art technology including computers to simulate battlefield conditions and, like Fort Irwin, uses a permanent opposition force, probably drawn from a tank division nearby. If the Chinese fully exploit the opposition force concept, these troops will probably use tactics designed to simulate those that China's ground forces would face against a Soviet attack.

According to press reports, eventually every group army will travel to the National Training Center for combat evaluation. However, intensive combined-arms training at a single national facility for China's 77 infantry divisions would require more than five years, and we believe instead that the Nanjing facility will serve as a model for the development of other combined-arms training centers throughout China.

We believe that reorganization and consolidation of the armed forces have not significantly reduced China's fighting strength. In the past two years, we estimate that as many as 400,000 troops have been trimmed from China's ground combat forces (excluding cuts in the General Logistics Department and the General Political Department). The majority—300,000—of the personnel reductions were a result of the elimination of four military region staffs and the consolidation of 35 main force armies into 24 larger group armies, resulting in the elimination of 11 army command staffs. Thus, net reductions in PLA fighting strength have probably been limited to 100,000 troops—roughly 3 percent of PLA ground forces—composed largely of China's oldest, least educated officers and soldiers.

Moreover, China's force modernization and reorganization are aimed largely at improving defensive capabilities against the Soviet Union, and thus we do not detect any reduction in emphasis on this sensitive military front. In the three military regions along the Sino-Soviet border, most combat troops from the four disbanded field armies were absorbed into 13 new, larger group armies. The group armies are still far from equal in fighting power to their Soviet counterparts but troop levels along the Soviet border now constitute a greater proportion of total Chinese troop strength than before reorganization. Moreover, group armies opposite the USSR will continue to have priority in receiving China's limited modern weapons.

The ground force reorganization has resulted in only marginal changes in the distribution of Chinese forces arrayed against Vietnam and Taiwan. Opposite Vietnam, Chinese ground forces were reduced from seven field armies to four larger group armies, probably resulting in a net reduction of some 40,000 combat troops. This reduction is more than offset, however, by

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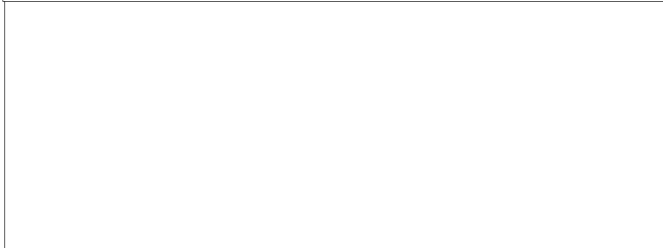
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the presence of [redacted] troops from other regions based near the Malipo battlefield for much of the year. Out-of-area troops bear the brunt of fighting against Vietnam and allow Beijing to maintain military pressure on Hanoi without concentrating battle casualties among troops permanently based along the

border. Combined-arms operations in any case are ill suited for the mountainous terrain of the Sino-Vietnamese border. [redacted]

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China's military capabilities opposite Taiwan depend largely on the naval and air balance along the Taiwan Strait, and improvements in ground forces have only a limited impact on China's force-projection capabilities there. Beijing has cut its ground forces opposite Taiwan [redacted] largely through the elimination of the 29th Army. China's combat capability against Taiwan, however, has probably been only slightly reduced. The remaining army in Fujian Province is the best equipped force in southern China and now includes a fourth infantry division and new AAA, artillery, and tank brigades. [redacted]

As a result of resource constraints and long-term defense priorities, we believe that China's military modernization program may result in the emergence of two distinct types of group armies in the next decade. Group armies deployed against Vietnam and Taiwan will probably remain infantry-heavy forces because their opponents are less mechanized than the Soviets. Primary improvements will probably consist of weapons best suited to supporting infantry operations—towed artillery, mortars, small arms, tactical radios, and artillery fire-control systems—and integrated close air support coordination. In contrast, group armies arrayed against the Soviet Union will probably become highly mechanized formations with weapons comparable to Soviet and Western 1980s-vintage designs, and potentially offer a major capability to project military power. [redacted]

Implications for the United States and the West

Beijing's recognition of the equipment deficiencies apparent in the group armies does not mean that China is ready to buy outright large quantities of military hardware from the West. China's priority, as reflected in the state budget, is not major defense spending but building China's civilian economy. Equipping the group armies soon to meet the idealized weapon holdings would be prohibitively expensive—for example, China would have to build over 10,000

armored personnel carriers to mechanize every infantry division. [redacted]
very few weapon systems are in production for the ground forces. [redacted]

To overcome the shortage of funds for weapons research and development, Beijing has increasingly sought "creative financing" arrangements in the West. [redacted]

In other discussions [redacted]
the Chinese military-industrial complex is increasingly insistent on exploring the possibilities of offset agreements or long-term loans to finance the projects. [redacted]

In some cases, to explore concepts requiring modern equipment, the Chinese General Staff will buy a few samples of selected military hardware. The Chinese, for example, are planning to form an army aviation/army air corps structure with light attack helicopters subordinate to the group army. [redacted]

Rather than buying equipment, Beijing is more likely for the next few years to seek critical technologies from the West to "leapfrog" the weapons of the 1970s and 1980s and to revamp its defense industries to build weapons capable of meeting the anticipated Soviet threat of the 21st century (see inset). Using the slogan "win the 21st century," an article in the authoritative *Liberation Army Daily* in October 1985, authored by members of the General Staff Department, strongly urged that the PLA should build for the future and concentrate its limited resources on

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***China's Window of Security:
Buying Time To Modernize***

Restricted articles by China's senior foreign policy advisers disclose that Beijing believes the Soviet Union is concentrating on rebuilding its economy and defending the gains it made in the 1970s before resuming the offensive early in the next century. At that time, Moscow will increase the military pressure on China to bend Beijing's policy to Moscow's will. This Chinese judgment is reflected in Beijing's continuing and determined military modernization program designed to meet the Soviet threat in the next century. Chinese Deputy Chief of Staff Xu Xin told a US delegation last July that the Soviet Union remains China's most severe security threat, but the next 10 to 15 years represent a window of security that allows China to reorganize its military.

We believe that Beijing's strategy requires a low level of tensions with Moscow if its reform program, which includes the ambitious military modernization drive, is to succeed. This strategy will probably become more difficult—and more crucial—over the next decade. Indeed, as its military strength grows, Beijing will be compelled to pursue a dialogue with the Soviet Union to avoid unduly increasing friction with a powerful adversary, creating an arms race that China is not able to win. Beijing realizes that no military strategy it might choose would allow it to fully meet the Soviet threat. Accordingly, the Chinese continue to see talks as the key to controlling tensions. To this end, we expect Beijing to continue to exchange visits and to sign economic and technical agreements with Moscow—without fundamentally altering its assessment of the Soviet threat. For more information on how China has chosen to manage the Soviet threat,

acquiring advanced military technologies for their military-industrial complex and delay the production of a lot of military hardware. The Chinese, therefore, are focusing their acquisition efforts on the “smart” weapons⁵ of the West:

- In September 1985, Xie Guang, a senior Chinese arms-procurement officer, told a visiting US official that China was no longer interested in buying the I-TOW antitank missile but proposed for the first time a joint US-Chinese development program for a sophisticated, laser-guided antitank missile.

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- Chinese buyers are seeking the technology for guided and unguided submunitions—designed to destroy massed armor formations—that can be delivered by aircraft, artillery, and multiple-rocket launchers.

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- Advanced Western air defense systems could provide a quantum improvement in the battlefield survivability of China's group armies. In the spring of 1986, officials of China's General Staff Department, although having requested a briefing on the US improved HAWK air defense missile, were far more interested in discussing a coproduction scheme for the more modern Patriot system.

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In addition to seeking the advanced technologies, Beijing is looking for assistance in learning systems analysis in the management of defense research and development projects. Beijing's track record on producing the appropriate weapon, in the right decade to

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⁵ “Smart” or “fire and forget” weapons use computer microcircuits and heat sensors or radar to identify enemy targets without being aimed or controlled after firing. For example, the US SADARM (Search and Destroy Armor) is delivered by aircraft or artillery over massed enemy armor and, while descending by parachute, identifies and fires a projectile at the heat signature of vehicle engines

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meet the threat, is abysmal, and indications are strong that China's defense industry leaders are intent on correcting this problem. According to US military officers, during a visit to the United States last November, China's Political Commissar for the National Defense Science, Technology, and Industry Commission, Wu Shaozu, was more interested in the US management approach to military research and development than in hardware. In fact, Wu invited a US joint systems analysis team to visit Beijing in 1987 to educate Chinese scientists on the US approach.

In the shorter term, the Chinese will increasingly seek Western assistance in areas where they can make significant improvements to their group armies without substantial expenditures of funds:

- *Combat Doctrine and Operational Concepts.* We believe Beijing intends to take advantage of US and NATO experience in combined-arms operations and knowledge of Soviet doctrine and tactics. During US Army Chief of Staff Wickham's visit to China in November 1986, Chinese military leaders expressed profound interest in exchanges of military academy students, and the Chinese have already asked the US defense attaches in Beijing to lecture on a variety of topics at the newly formed National Defense University including army aviation doctrine, command and control, and air defense procedures for US ground forces. During meetings in Beijing with US Army combat operations experts in February, Chinese strategists demonstrated a strong focus on US operational art and doctrine for combating massed Soviet armor.
- *Combined-Arms Tactics.* Beijing has made an extensive effort to study US and NATO modern combat tactics. Greater exposure to Western war-fighting doctrine—and the PLA's growing emphasis

on realistic combined-arms training—should result in improved Chinese combined-arms operations, especially as more modern weapons become available and younger, better educated officers move into command positions.

- *Force-Management Techniques.* Beijing's interest in Western force-management techniques will probably grow with the increasing complexity of group army equipment. Especially in the northern military regions, the focus of wartime logistics management is shifting to providing spare parts for laser range-finders, battlefield computers, and large-caliber ammunition. China will probably focus on the tools used to manage logistics—quality-assurance technology, large-scale automated logistics management systems—and probably does not perceive a need to copy Western force sustainment methods or significantly modify the PLA's decentralized force management practices. However, as its appreciation for the cost and complexity of modern ground force equipment grows, the PLA may adopt a more centralized, demand-driven logistic system to manage its most expensive weapon components.

Beijing's formation of the group armies, therefore, is the first step in a long process—one that spans decades—of force modernization. Emphasis in the near term will be on those low-cost areas of force restructuring, training, the development of the operational art, and experimentation. But the new formations are designed to carry the Chinese Army into the 21st century with the hope that, once the funding is available and defense industries become sufficiently modernized, Beijing can field a truly modern force capable of meeting any adversary, even the Soviet Union.

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